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4 Ways It Can Help You

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Build Stronger Relationships, Make New Friends

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- Is That Text Message a Fake?
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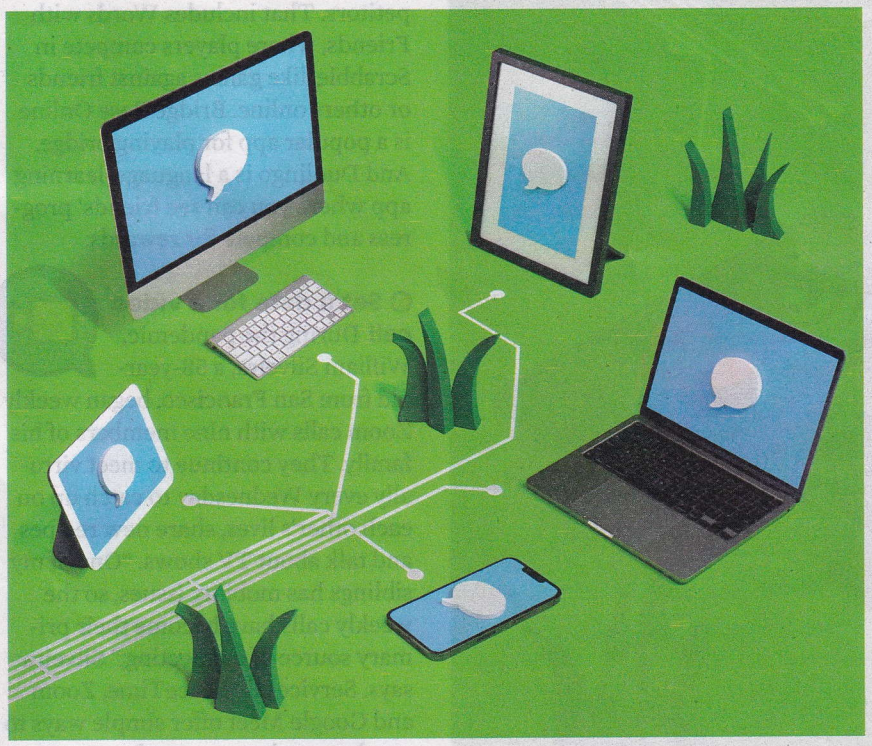
BONUS SECTION

YOUR TECH, SIMPLIFIED

AARP THE MAGAZINE's annual tech guide showcases new ways digital devices can benefit you in real life



THE DIGITAL LIFELINE

Tech can help older people feel more connected

By LEXI PANDELL

STAYING CONNECTED through technology may seem like second nature for younger generations. But while the kids scroll and swipe their way through constant connection, many older adults are experiencing something different: loneliness. One in 3 adults ages 50 to 80 report feeling isolated, according to the 2023 National Poll on Healthy Aging. And that can have health implications. Social isolation is linked to a 50 percent increased risk of dementia as well as higher risks of heart disease and stroke. "A lot of research finds that loneliness is related to how long we live," says Ashwin Kotwal, a physician and associate professor of medicine in the Division of Geriatrics at UC San Francisco.

Technology can offer surprisingly powerful ways to maintain and even grow relationships. In fact, 76 percent of adults over 50 rely on tech to keep in touch with loved ones. Here are some ways technology can help combat loneliness.

Connect through online communities and forums Seventy-four percent of adults age 50 and up use social media, according to AARP research released this year—and in many cases, the platforms help them meet people beyond their "friends" list.

After divorcing at age 60 and moving home to Louisville, Kentucky, Lisa Marcellino needed to rebuild her social group. Then she joined The Ethel Circle (*facebook.com/groups/theethelcircle*), a private AARP Facebook group for women interested in healthy aging. "It's amazing to me

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how many people find comfort there," Marcellino says. "A lot of people are really inspirational and send positive vibes across the feed." This experience has led her to make connections IRL (in real life). Ethel participants in Louisville organize monthly lunches and occasional weekend group getaways. They also invite each other to birthday parties. "It was a great introduction online," Marcellino says, "but being able to hug the girls has been the most important."

Try audio messages instead of text Texting is an effective way to stay in touch with people, but it can feel impersonal. Audio messages—short audio clips sent via messaging apps—can provide a more human touch. Send an audio message by tapping the microphone icon in your message app. Then talk and send. The recipient clicks on the message to listen. Tracy Maurer, a 57-year-old from Castro Valley, California, sends audio messages via Facebook Messenger. "I get comments from people saying, 'It's so great to hear your voice, enthusiasm and emotion,'" she says.

Play games with friends Video games, particularly those on phones, have soared in popularity for older adults, with more than 50 million older gamers in the United States. Many mobile phone games are social too, with in-game messaging or competition between distant competitors. That includes Words with Friends, where players compete in Scrabble-like games against friends or others online. Bridge Base Online is a popular app for playing bridge. And Duolingo is a language-learning app where you can see friends' progress and compete for rewards.

Set a date for a video call During the pandemic, William Silveira, a 58-year-old from San Francisco, began weekly Zoom calls with nine members of his family. They continue to meet virtually every Wednesday to catch up on each other's lives, share new recipes and talk about TV shows. "One of my siblings has mobility issues, so the weekly calls have become their primary source of connecting," Silveira says. Services like FaceTime, Zoom and Google Meet offer simple ways to see the people you care about.

Join a watch party With the right tools, watching TV can be a shared long-distance experience. Watch parties—where people view the same movie or show in sync and chat about it—are popular. Some streaming platforms offer the feature to subscribers, or try a third-party service like Teleparty, Rave or Scener.

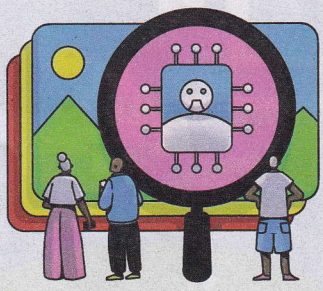
Lexi Pandell is a contributing writer who covers technology. Her work has appeared in Wired, The New York Times, The Atlantic *and other publications.*

BE SURE TO USE SOME CAUTION

To protect yourself from scammers and other criminals, approach online interactions cautiously. Be alert if a new connection quickly over-relates to you, showers you with flattery or professes love. "If there is discussion of financial support, money or cryptocurrency, it means stop," says Amy Nofziger, director of fraud victim support for AARP's Fraud Watch Network. Never share sensitive information like passwords or other account info. Also, be wary if someone suggests moving the conversation to another platform; they may be trying to avoid moderation and reporting tools. If you decide to meet someone, opt for a public place or a group outing, Nofziger says. And there's no shame in cutting off a conversation or skipping a meetup that feels off. "It's better to be skeptical than to lose your money," she says.

TECH TRIAGE

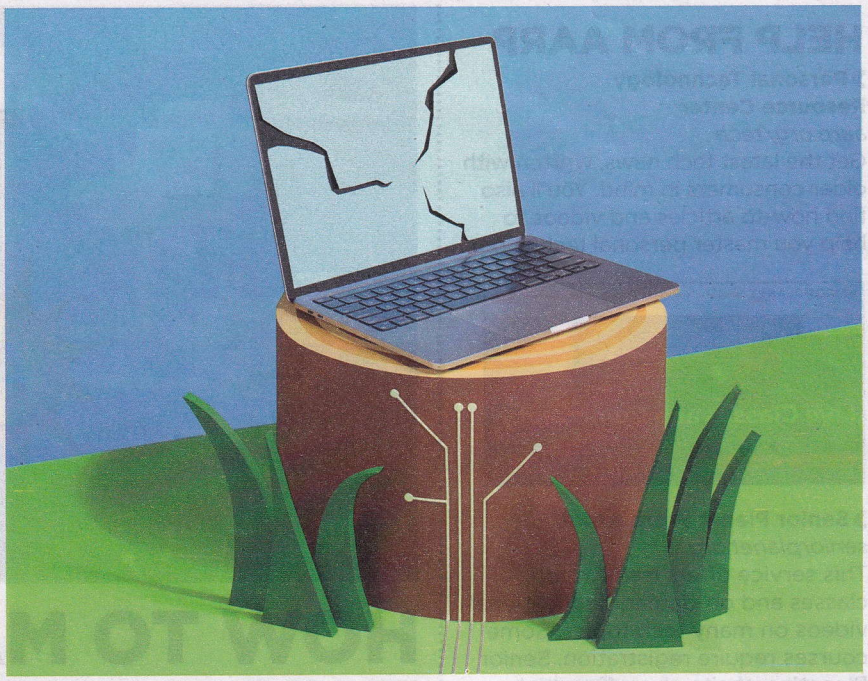
Our experts answer your most pressing questions



How can I tell if a message or photo was made by AI?

With AI tools becoming more advanced in creating content that looks and sounds real, it's important to understand how to verify information and images. There are some telltale signs to look for. When it comes to text or audio, if the wording seems too perfect or overly formal and doesn't match the tone of the person who supposedly wrote it or said it, it was likely AI-generated. And audio that is generated by AI may sound emotionless. Another sign is when the same words or phrases are often repeated.

For photos, look closely. AI often slips up on small details and creates inconsistencies in lighting and shadows, strange reflections and backgrounds, oddly positioned hands, mismatched earrings and so on. But as AI improves, this may become more difficult to detect. For trickier cases, online tools—such as Winston AI, AI or Not, or WasItAI—can help. *—Jonathan Ushindi Zaluke, Senior Planet "techspert"*



What's the best way to back up all my phone photos automatically?

Most smartphones now offer built-in options for automatic backup:

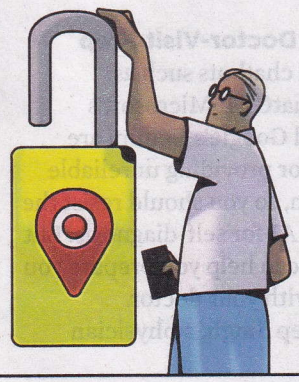
➔ **If you have an iPhone,** set up iCloud Photos to sync photos and videos across all Apple devices. The free 5 gigabytes can hold hundreds of photos. Apple offers extra storage called iCloud+, starting at 99 cents per month for 50GB.

➔ **For Android users,** Google Photos comes preinstalled on their phones. Google account users get 15GB of free storage, but this is used by other applications too. Google offers Google One plans for more storage that start at $1.99 per month for 100GB.

➔ **Amazon Prime members** can take advantage of unlimited photo storage through Amazon Photos. Prime memberships cost $14.99 per month or $139 per year. If you're not interested in Prime, the Amazon Photos app offers 5GB of storage free, with paid plans starting at $1.99 per month for 100GB.

➔ **Other reliable choices** include Microsoft OneDrive and Dropbox.

No matter which service you choose, go into its settings and turn on automatic backup. It may be listed under an option to enable backup, upload or sync features. If possible, set it to back up over Wi-Fi to avoid using mobile data. Once set up, everything happens in the background, keeping your memories safe without any extra work. *—J.U.Z.*



How do I stop my phone from tracking me?

It's understandable to feel uneasy about your phone keeping track of your location, but it is necessary sometimes. Some features, like maps and weather updates, need to know where you are to work best. But not all apps need to know so much. You can control how much information you share.

Go into your phone's settings and look for Privacy or Location options. There, you can see which apps are asking to know your location. If location is important to an app's function, change the setting to "while using the app"; if not, change it to "never."

Within privacy settings, you can also find options related to activity tracking (such as what websites you visit) and personalized ads. Consider turning off that tracking too. You can always turn it back on if you find that a particular app no longer works as it should. *—Zeke Tijerina, Senior Planet trainer*

HELP FROM AARP

Personal Technology Resource Center
aarp.org/tech
Get the latest tech news, written with older consumers in mind. You'll also find how-to articles and videos to help you master personal technology.

Senior Planet From AARP
seniorplanet.org
This service offers free virtual classes and on-demand educational videos on many tech topics. Some courses require registration. Senior Planet's website also offers tech advice articles and downloadable tech guides.

Senior Planet Hotline
888-713-3495
Looking for free help from a human? Call this phone line between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. ET weekdays or 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. ET Saturdays. Patient agents will answer your tech questions.

AARP Virtual Community Center
local.aarp.org/virtual-community-center/tech-help
The VCC offers online learning events about tech. Registration is required.

AARP Books
aarp.org/techbooks
AARP publishes books that can help with personal tech.

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aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork
Technology fuels fraud. Stay informed about the latest scams and how to prevent them, and get support if you or a loved one has been targeted.

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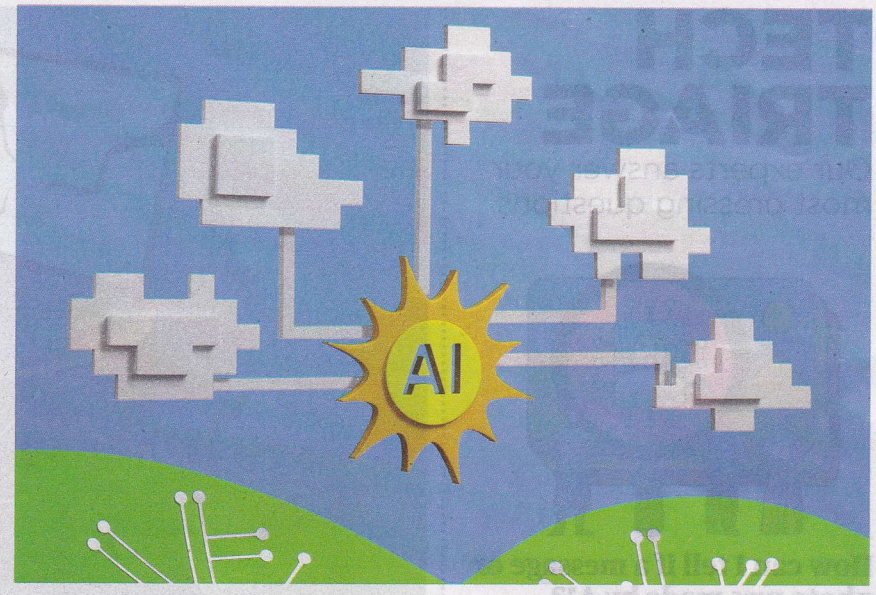


HOW TO MAKE AI WORK FOR YOU

4 ways this technology can help improve your life

By EDWARD C. BAIG

IT'S BEEN ABOUT two and a half years since "AI" became a buzzword. That's when ChatGPT, a web-based chatbot that addresses your questions through artificial intelligence, debuted. But AI had been around for years—decades, really—before that, and has many applications.

Here are a few ways you can benefit from AI.

Remote patient monitoring

Various AI-enabled wearables can detect falls, high blood pressure, troubling heart rates or glucose levels, even early signs of stroke. And health-monitoring tech is moving into bathroom scales, cameras, video recording devices and steam showers, reports elder care advocate Laurie Orlov, founder of Aging and Health Technology Watch. By leveraging AI, such devices aim to provide caregivers and loved ones peace of mind.

For example, electronic room sensors and "smart inserts" can be strategically placed on beds, chairs and elsewhere around a house or senior living facility to "passively" monitor a person's daily routines and certain health metrics, without the use of intrusive cameras or microphones. Real-time alerts can be sent to caregivers if, say, the person gets out of bed at an unusual hour without returning.

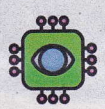
And a "virtual care agent" can pick up sounds from pods plugged in around the house that may detect if an adult is lying on the floor. If so, caregivers are immediately contacted.

Doctor-Visit Prep

AI chatbots such as ChatGPT, Microsoft's Copilot and Google's Gemini are notorious for providing unreliable information, so you should resist the urge to use AI for self-diagnosis. But these tools can help you prepare you for a visit with your doctor.

Karandeep Singh, a physician

and chief health AI officer at UC San Diego Health, says to use a chatbot like this: "You might type, 'You are an oncologist. I have a question about cancer,'" Singh says. Then you might want to follow up with, "Make sure the answers are super easy for me to understand. I don't know much about health lingo" before typing a specific medical question. This can provide good talking points for your doctor visit, but be sure to confirm any information with that medical professional.



Accessibility The latest smartphones have AI-fueled features to help people who don't see or hear well or have issues with motor skills. Explore the accessibility settings on your device.

For example, the Guided Frame feature on Google's Pixel can help a person with limited vision snap a selfie. The feature detects when one or more people, or even pets, are in or out of the frame. Audio, visual or vibration cues provide instructions on how to position the phone.

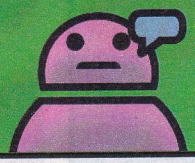
Apple iPhones let you clone your voice. Then you can type phrases on the keyboard as the phone reads them aloud in your voice. Though initially designed for people with conditions that put their ability to speak at risk—such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)—anyone can take advantage of this Personal Voice feature.

WHERE THE CHATBOTS ARE

Go to any of these sites and start asking questions:

- **ChatGPT** *chatgpt.com*
- **Copilot** *copilot.microsoft.com*
- **Gemini** *gemini.google.com*

Confirm info received with a trusted source.



Entertainment Finding what you want to watch on TV is an age-old problem. These days, there's so much to choose from.

Netflix is addressing the issue with the help of ChatGPT creator Open AI. It has begun rolling out an AI search tool in iOS that will let you find content on Netflix according to your mood rather than just a particular actor or genre. You could say, into the microphone, "I want to watch something scary—but not too scary and also maybe a little bit funny but not ha-ha funny," and recommendations appear.

In a similar vein for streaming music, premium Spotify customers can create AI playlists with tunes for a mood or occasion. You might enter "Romantic songs to celebrate my 25th wedding anniversary," "The best karaoke songs of all time" or "Great songs to come out of the movies."

Edward C. Baig covers personal technology for AARP.

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3 Important Questions Answered About Identity Theft

LifeLock is the leader in identity theft protection

Identity theft can be frightening, but protection is crucial. What is identity theft? It's when criminals use your personal or financial information to open credit card accounts or loans in your name, leaving you with the bill. They might also file false tax returns or steal valuable assets like your 401k or home title.

Don't worry...LifeLock has your back. Check out this Q&A to learn more about identity theft myths and how LifeLock can protect you.

Q: I have credit monitoring and protection through my bank, isn't that enough?

A: Credit monitoring alerts you to suspicious activity on your credit reports. LifeLock goes further, monitoring and alerting you to activity that banks, credit card providers, and credit bureaus might miss, even on the dark web. LifeLock scans hundreds of millions of data points per second, offering a more complete protection. Plus, if your identity is stolen, LifeLock will help you recover.

Q: I don't have millions in my bank account — doesn't that limit my risk?

A: Thieves can rack up debt or sign up for costly medical care in your name, leaving you with the bill. LifeLock offers peace of mind by reimbursing stolen funds up to $1M††† with their most comprehensive plan.

Q: A stolen home title sounds like something out of a movie. Is that even possible?

A: Criminals can submit forged documents to try and steal your home title, or impersonate you to take loans against your home. But don't worry, LifeLock will help monitor your property records and detect changes in financing, default notices, and more.

The good news: AARP members can save up to 44%* on LifeLock identity theft protection plans that can detect and alert you to threats you could miss on your own.

Explore your AARP member benefit by calling LifeLock at 1-844-506-4200 or Scan the QR code to visit LifeLock/AARPLL19 ▶

No one can prevent all cybercrime or identity theft. ††† Up to $1 million for coverage for lawyers and experts, collectively, if needed, for all plans. Reimbursement and Expense Compensation, each with limits of up to $1 million for Ultimate Plus, up to $100,000 for Advantage and up to $25,000 for Standard. Benefits under the Master Policy are issued and covered by third party insurance companies. See NortonLifelock.com/Legal for policy info. *Terms apply.

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